

Animals vs. Humans

The recent killing of Cecil the lion by an American trophy hunter in Zimbabwe has renewed the debate on what we should—and shouldn't—do to preserve Africa's wildlife

BY ALESSANDRA POTENZA



A lion in Nairobi National Park, on the outskirts of Kenya's capital, in August

In July, hunters lured a 13-year-old lion named Cecil from a protected area in a national park in Zimbabwe. A dentist from Minnesota—who had paid more than \$50,000 for the chance to kill an African lion—wounded Cecil with a crossbow. He then reportedly tracked the lion for nearly two days before fatally shooting him with a rifle.

The killing of Cecil, who was a local tourist attraction and had been studied by scientists since 2008, caused an uproar on social media and sparked outrage around the world. It also renewed

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Trophy hunter
Walter Palmer (left)
with another lion he killed,
in an undated photo

the debate over trophy hunting and how best to preserve Africa's wildlife.

More than a million people have signed a petition asking Zimbabwe to stop issuing permits to hunt animals like lions and elephants. And some major U.S. airlines announced they would no longer transport big game "trophies," like lion heads. The American dentist, Walter Palmer, who says he thought the hunt was legal, received death threats and faced an online campaign to have him extradited to Zimbabwe. He was forced to close his office in Bloomington, Minnesota, for more than two weeks when it was surrounded by protesters.

Amid the uproar, some Africans were perplexed by the sadness over Cecil's death. "Do all those Americans signing petitions understand that lions actually kill people?" Goodwell Nzou, who grew up in Zimbabwe, wrote in *The New York Times*. "They are objects of terror."

Indeed, the debate over trophy hunting isn't as simple as it first seemed. Though some think it's a cruel and tasteless sport, many wildlife experts contend that regulated hunting actually helps preserve wildlife by generating money for conservation programs.

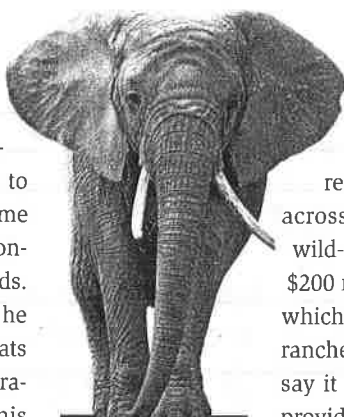
"There is evidence that well-managed hunting actually can contribute to conservation globally," says Mike Hoffmann, a senior scientist at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Others, including many animal rights activists, disagree. "Trophy hunting of endangered species in this modern day is not necessary," says Jeffrey Flocken at the International Fund for Animal Welfare. "It's just an additional threat on top of the other ones these animals are already facing."

Poaching & Habitat Loss

Africa has lost up to 60 percent of its large wild animals in the past 40 years. One reason wildlife is disappearing is poaching, especially the slaughter of rhinos and elephants for their horns and ivory tusks, which feeds a \$20 billion-a-year industry; 30,000 elephants are killed by poachers in Africa annually to meet huge demand for ivory in China and elsewhere.

But conservationists agree that habitat loss is the biggest threat to wildlife. With Africa's population ballooning—it's expected to double to 2.5 billion by 2050—cities are expanding and rural populations are pushing into areas previously occupied only by animals. In Mozambique, for example, the number of people living inside one of the country's national parks grew to about 35,000 in 2012 from about 21,000 in 2001. The population is increasingly clashing with lions, officials say, catching them and



Africa's Wildlife BY THE NUMBERS

300,000

Number of elephants living in the wild in Africa, down from 3 to 5 million in the early 1900s.

SOURCE: WWF (ESTIMATES)

600

Number of lions trophy hunters kill every year in Africa. There are about 30,000 lions left on the continent.

SOURCE: IUCN (ESTIMATES)

\$45,000

Value of a pound of rhino horn. Gold, in comparison, is worth about \$20,000 a pound.

SOURCE: THE WASHINGTON POST

\$200 million

Amount brought in by trophy hunting in Africa every year.

SOURCE: A STUDY BY P.A. ROULET (UNIVERSITÉ D'ORLÈANS), AND P.A. LINDSEY AND S.S. ROMAÑACH (UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE)

killing them when they attack livestock.

That's a problem that many fear will increase if trophy hunting, which is currently allowed in 23 African nations, is banned across the continent. In addition to controlling wild-animal populations, trophy hunting brings in \$200 million annually. Supporters say that money, which trophy hunters pay governments or private ranchers, contributes to conservation efforts; they say it also trickles down into local communities, providing funds to build schools, clinics, and infrastructure. Without those benefits, experts fear, locals won't have an incentive to tolerate wildlife.

That's what's happening in Botswana, where trophy hunting was outlawed in 2014. The ban has deprived locals of money that was once used to build homes for the poor and install toilets.

"Before, when there was hunting, we wanted to protect those animals because we knew we earned something out of them," says villager Jimmy Baitsholedi Ntema. "Now we don't benefit at all from the animals."

Saving Namibia's Lions

African nations set varying rules for trophy hunting. Some ban the killing of animals that can still breed or are critically endangered. (Lions are ranked as "vulnerable," below "endangered" and "critically endangered.") But enforcing the rules can be difficult. Some guides illegally take hunters to protected areas or lure the animals out, as in the case of Cecil. And the money from hunting isn't always handled properly. A 2013 report found that as little as 3 percent of those funds actually makes it to locals.

Such problems have led some to search for other ways to preserve wildlife, including tourist programs like photo safaris. That's worked in Namibia, where the creation of conservancies run by locals has allowed the country to set aside 20 percent of its land for conservation. As a result, Namibia's populations of desert lions, desert elephants, and black rhinos—all recently threatened with extinction—have increased several times over.

Namibia's success story could be key to inspiring other African nations to boost their conservation efforts—and to do so by involving locals.

"We don't live in an age anymore where we can just take a protected area and just say to surrounding communities, 'Sorry, you're not allowed in there, that's for the animals,'" says Hoffmann at the IUCN. "Communities [must] feel like they do have a say." •

With reporting by Norimitsu Onishi of *The Times*.